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Unrelenting heat nears record



Staff photos — Jerry Larson, Duane A. Laverty

ABOVE: Elizabeth Jones, 7, cools off in the fountain near the Baylor Sciences Building. **BELOW:** Tanya, an elephant at the Cameron Park Zoo, enjoys a frozen treat Friday. Waco has experienced 30 straight days with temperatures higher than 100 degrees.

String of 100-degree days makes this summer one of the hottest ever

By Michael W. Shapiro and Jessica Chia

Tribune-Herald staff writers

Humans and animals alike are dealing with a summer that ranks among the hottest and driest on record.

According to the National Weather Service, Waco had its 30th straight day of 100-degree-or-

102.8

The average high temperature during Waco's 30 straight days of triple-digit temperatures.

higher heat Friday, tying for the second-longest streak with 1969.

The latest forecast indicates the high temperatures aren't abating, and the National Weather Service extended a heat advisory through Sunday.

The advisory notes that with hu-

midity it will feel as hot as 105 degrees.

Texas and the Waco area also are more parched than most years.

Texas is experiencing its third-most severe drought on record, according to the Palmer Drought Index, a model based on soil moisture.

"And in Waco we're a little shy of 2 inches below normal for July, and for the year we're a little over 8 inches below normal," said Dennis Cavanaugh, a meteorologist at the NWS.



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In a state agricultural zone that includes the Waco region and stretches to include North Texas, "we need 15 inches (of rain) to get out of the drought," Cavanaugh said.

The drought may be causing bats to spend more time hunting insects, according to Han Li, a Baylor University biology graduate student who tracks the furry nocturnal creatures.

He said bats earlier in the year were starting to forage for insects between 9:30 and 10:30 at night, but "they're definitely going out earlier than normal," he said.

"Now, I get their echolocation signals at 8:30 or earlier," Li said.

Several bat experts have noted Texas' prolonged drought has hurt plants and insects. They are studying whether that has forced bats to leave their roosts earlier so they can spend more time searching for bugs.

The heat hasn't fazed animals at the Cameron Park Zoo, but it's taking a toll on their handlers.

"We have not seen any animals with heat stress yet," said Johnny Binder, general

curator at the zoo.

"Who suffers from the heat most at our zoo is the staff," he added, noting he's mindful of making sure employees have enough water and breaks.

Still, zoo staffers provide plenty of opportunities for the animals to cool off.

The doors to their barns are left open in the summer so animals have access to air conditioning at all times, and their exhibits are outfitted with natural and artificial shade structures, misting or sprinkling systems and fans.

Many animals also have pools they can fully submerge themselves in, and are fed frozen treats prepared by

zoo staff.

Binder said the heat doesn't have much impact on the zoo's budget.

"I'd think it increases our workload, if anything," he said, because "we have to monitor the animals by the hour during extreme temperatures."

"We watch for signs of heat stress: light vomiting, lethargy and heavy panting," mammal keeper Rachel Chappell said. "One nice thing is that a lot of times visitors will let us know if something does not seem right to them, and we always check on those tips."

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Tips to beat the heat

- Be sure to check on people with health problems and the elderly, as they are the most susceptible to heat exhaustion and heat stroke.

- Never leave young children or pets in an enclosed vehicle, even for a short time, as temperatures can rise quickly to life-threatening levels.

- Take extra precautions if you work or spend time outside. When possible, reschedule strenuous activities to early morning or evening.

- Know the signs and symptoms of heat exhaustion and heat stroke. Wear lightweight and loose-fitting clothing when possible and drink plenty of water. To reduce risk during outdoor work, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration recommends scheduling frequent rest breaks in shaded or air-conditioned environments.

- Anyone overcome by heat should be moved to a cool and shaded location. Heat stroke is an emergency — call 9-1-1.

Source: National Weather Service